

Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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A column from State Senator Pam Helming

Creating a Pathway to Employment in EMS and Fire Service

by Senator Pam Helming

In every conversation I have with our local EMS providers and fire departments, there is a constant refrain: We need more volunteers and more young people to consider emergency service as a career.

Over the last several years, I've led roundtables and workgroups throughout my district convening EMS professionals, fire chiefs and municipalities and counties to discuss this critical challenge, evaluate local needs and develop solutions.

These collaborations have led to important outcomes, like the creation of the state's Rural Ambulance Services Task Force which I helped champion, and legislation I sponsor to boost volunteer firefighter recruitment by allowing local fire departments with youth training programs to let student volunteers safely observe an active emergency or hazardous response.

Recently, I held a meeting with Matthew Flowers of Genesee Valley BOCES and Floyd Sick and Jerry Jackson of Dansville Ambulance Company to discuss the possibility of starting an EMS training and certification program to prepare students for jobs with their local ambulance and fire departments, specifically as Certified First Responders (CFRs) and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).

In New York state, a student must be 16 years old to complete a CFR program and exam and 17 years old to complete an EMT program and exam. An approved BOCES program also has the potential to reach adult students seeking new career opportunities.

BOCES programs have long been models for workforce training and preparedness. In the 54th District, we are fortunate to have Genesee Valley BOCES, Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES and Monroe One BOCES pioneering and leading career and technical education programs that prepare our youth for in-demand jobs in the trades, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, veterinary science and more.

This year, BOCES is celebrating 75 years of service to New York students, schools, communities and employers. According to BOCES of New York State, on average, 47 percent of career and technical education graduates enter the workforce directly after graduation with good-paying, dependable jobs.

The state's Rural Ambulance Services Task Force is charged with making recommendations for improvements to emergency response services and is expected to report on its findings as early as December. An EMS training and certification program, in collaboration with BOCES and provider agencies and departments, would be great for the task force and our State Legislature to consider. It's an investment in our people, in local jobs and in public health and safety.

I was proud to nominate for appointment to the task force Syed Ahmed Mustafa, President and CEO of Northeast Quadrant Advanced Life Support (NEQALS), based in Monroe County and serving parts of the 54th District. I thank Ahmed for his service on the task force and for his more than 30 years of service as a first responder.

More than three-quarters of volunteer fire departments in the state have reported a decrease in the number of volunteers as calls for service increased nearly 30 percent between 1997 and 2020.

Working or volunteering in your local EMS or fire service is one of the most impactful ways you can help your neighbors and community. Thank you to all of our first responders in the 54th District who keep our residents and families safe, and our communities strong.

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